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NATO Strategy for the Future: A Concept

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The purpose of the study was to determine how present NATO strategy can be adapted to exploit the weak seam (political-social fabric) of the Warsaw Pact.

The study offers a conceptual approach for a future NATO strategy which more clearly announces NATO's intent to use theater nuclear weapons in Eastern Bloc territory through which a Soviet attack against NATO is launched. By attacking the weak seam of the Warsaw Pact, this study argues that this conflict avoidance strategy would result in self-imposed constraints by Warsaw Pact nations and could result in a closer relationship between East European nations and the West.



A Concept Paper for  
The NATO Study Group

Major K.A. Steadman  
Section 3.

This paper presents some thoughts about a possible NATO strategy for the future. It attempts to assess the changes in both the NATO and Warsaw Pact Alliances (WPA) that have occurred in the recent past and to take into account some of the influences of the present upon the future of NATO strategy. The ideas expressed are neither comprehensive nor certainties, for history has a way of frustrating our expectations of the future. Nonetheless these ideas represent an effort to examine where we are with respect to NATO, and where we are likely to go with NATO.

Stalin is reported to have said in April, 1945. " This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise." <sup>1.</sup> To a large extent the reach of Stalin's army, and the partitioning of Europe was an expression of the reality of power. The lands under Stalin's reach had to be consolidated, however, and this consolidation dominated, and still dominates, the East-West dialogue. Eastern and Western Europe became, as George Kennan so succinctly put it, <sup>2.</sup> " the provinces of superpowers peripheral to Europe proper."

In East Europe Soviet power brought Communist regimes to life, nourished them, and seemed to draw them into a monolithic empire

dictated to by Moscow. Soviet power also formed a shield to protect their fledgling clients and themselves from an imagined Western military threat. What concerned the West was not the Soviet shield, but the sword which seemed poised to fall on Western Europe. This early postwar image of the massive Soviet military machine, prepared to overrun the rest of Europe, led the West to create the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) which seemed to stabilize, by virtue of the hostage threat, the military division of Europe and to immobilize its politics as well.<sup>2.</sup> NATO formed the military shield for the early postwar containment policies designed to defend against overt Communist aggression and to launch a political and economic offensive to create healthy<sup>4</sup> capitalist societies and to roll back the borders of the Communist.

It seems somehow ironic, that illusion of lifeless politics and vibrant policy, when contrasted to the realities of later developments. Reality began to appear when the United States recognized its carefully designed policy was going nowhere. Containment had been immobilized in order to avoid confrontation and in recognition of the dilemma the U.S. faced in Europe. Since World War II, U.S. foreign policy had been directed towards two major goals: preservation of a Democratic Western Europe and prevention of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Preserving



Western Europe meant an American commitment to use strategic nuclear weapons which increased the prospects for war, while taking steps to lower the risk of Soviet-American nuclear war seemed to jeopardize the security of Western Europe.<sup>5</sup>

With NATO strategy already deadlocked over this dilemma it was soon overwhelmed by political change in Western Europe. The reawakening of political life in Europe led to a revival of nationalism and some fundamental shifts in the political climate. DeGaulle's open challenge to American leadership, later compounded by the detente diplomacy of Willi Brandt's "Ostpolitik" gave rise to the thought that NATO had outlived its usefulness. While the dialogue about the future of NATO vanished with the Prague Spring the disturbing doubts about the American commitment encouraged the notion of polycentrism in Europe and the re-evaluation of the fundamental need for substantial U.S. forces in Europe by the American Congress. These forces of change, accelerated by the shift in the Soviet-American power relationship, seem to forecast a diminishing American role in NATO, a European dominated NATO, and a possibility of new power centers in Europe.

The recoil from Indo-China, the disappointment with the results of foreign aid, and the enormity of domestic demands suggest that the Mansfield Resolutions calling for unilateral force reductions

in Europe are likely to be realized in the not-too-distant future.<sup>6</sup> The American Congress does not question the need for a visible U.S. Component in NATO, but question how substantial that component must be in order to be visible. No doubt the reductions, when they come, will start with a symbolic cut, then grow in size until only a symbolic force remains to express the American commitment. In view of the interest of Americans in SALT and Soviet - American detente, Europeans are already questioning the American commitment to the security of Europe and should detente suffer a serious setback they may attempt to strengthen their own security within the NATO structure.<sup>7</sup>

The necessity for strengthening NATO in the face of a reduced American role poses several alternatives: increased conventional military force, development of a European nuclear deterrent, and continued reliance, although questionable in European minds, upon the U.S. nuclear umbrella. The first alternative accomplishes nothing. It only creates a confidence gap in the European military capability which allows a nuclear armed Soviet Union to dominate. The second alternative, the European nuclear deterrent creates changes in the balance of power too difficult, under present circumstances, to imagine. That leaves the third alternative, reliance on the U.S. nuclear force the most likely future.

The scale of U.S. and NATO military strategy, if it is to be both an effective deterrent and reassurance to Europe, must be changed to avoid the dilemma of achieving detente only at the expense of acquiescing in a divided Europe.<sup>8</sup> This requires that Europe accept detente and the United States redefine its nuclear strategy for NATO so as to take advantage of the sweeping Europe. Such a strategy must be based upon conflict avoidance. The American desire to avoid a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, which would harm Europe as well, requires a strategy to coerce the potential aggressor rather than defeat or destroy him. This suggests that the important thing about nuclear weapons is not to use them except to threaten in such a manner as to force self imposed restraints upon an enemy. The problem then is how to assure Western Europe of U.S. determination when the U.S. does not intend to use its strategic arsenal except in a coercive manner.

The solution seems to be suggested by the nature of the changes in alliance affairs generally and specifically in the Warsaw Pact itself. In the face of the unity displayed by the European economic programs and NATO the Soviet Union sought to assert its dominance over Eastern Europe through bilateral trade and defense agreements and multilateral instruments such as the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance and the Warsaw Pact. These instruments, so the Soviets thought, bound the nations of Eastern Europe to their own



policy interests. The Warsaw Pact served the Soviet Union by providing defense against a re-emerging and re-arming West, and assuring the Soviet Union of the continued power of local Communist parties dominated by and dictated to by Moscow. The Pact also served as a vehicle for the transport of Socialism supplied by the Soviet Union and as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>9.</sup>

Unfortunately the Soviet view of the alliance system was no more accurate than was the Western. In East Europe, as in the West, the alliance failed to function as an instrument of Soviet policy. The influence of Tito's resistance to Stalin's suasion cannot be accurately measured, but it clearly indicated as did events in Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia that Nationalism proved stronger than a common ideology.<sup>10.</sup> The almost simultaneous re-appearance of Nationalism in Western and Eastern Europe indicated that despite the efforts of the alliance authorities the two regions were moving, albeit one slower than the other, towards a multipolar power balance in Europe. The problems of discipline and disunity that plague the Soviet-directed Pact stem from the same political polycentrism that troubles the Western Alliance and now offers the West the opportunity to take advantage of these changes to redefine NATO strategy so as to avoid the U.S. dilemma.

A fundamental Soviet objective has been the removal of the U.S. strategic umbrella from Europe. Accomplishment would mean the elimination of the American military pressure, the diminution of American political influence, and the achievement of the long-sought-after goal of political domination of the continent by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has advanced this objective by exploiting political tensions aroused by the uncertainties of the U.S. commitment to Europe and by taking advantage of internal domestic pressures in the NATO member countries. Some writers have suggested attainment of this objective would amount to the Finlandization of Western Europe, referring to the Soviet ability to coerce tiny Finland to submit to Soviet hegemony.<sup>11.</sup> Still another writer sees it as the Soviet version of 'containment'; controlling Western military overtures while mounting political and economic offensives of their own to push back capitulationism.<sup>12.</sup> Thus the Soviets have exposed and exploited the weak seam in the NATO fabric. The political superstructure and the social substructure of NATO can be manipulated to topple the structure of NATO itself.

What NATO and the U.S. have failed to realize is that the same vulnerability exists in the fabric of the Warsaw Pact. Despite the best Soviet efforts to cultivate Socialism in the



the first blow relatively unhurt would hardly comfort the Pact members in their deliberations. And should they delay their deliberations it is not unlikely that national resentment, fanned into social unrest over this predicament, might provide the answer. Soviet recognition of the probable answer would also seem to restrain them from overt aggression in the first place. A decision to go ahead would risk "tearing off an arm" not to mention the additional forces required to hold open their lines of communications and perhaps even to fight their way through the charred ruins of Eastern Europe.<sup>14.</sup> Certainly such a strategy raises many more issues for the future than can be adequately addressed in the here and now, but those that are visible should be answered. This strategy must be regionally oriented to be effective. It must scale down the scope of the first nuclear response to a limited area, Eastern Europe, so as to provide a geographical firebrake on the far side of the Iron Curtain as well as a pause for risk assessment before the next exchange. This strategy may appear to lend itself to the American policy of flexible response graduated to the degree of threat and to raise the prospect for theater nuclear war. It would seem preferable, under the present circumstances, to raise the risk of theater nuclear war with limited damage than to risk strategic war and the complete destruction of Europe. However, it must be remembered such a strategy is designed for conflict avoidance firstly and war fighting secondly.

As a conflict avoidance strategy the self-imposed constraints it asserts upon the WPA strengthens those political forces already pushing nearer to a multipolar balance of power arrangement in Europe and may even draw the Eastern nations closer to those of the West. This event might defuse the potential for conflict and perhaps decouple Soviet military power from Eastern Europe itself.

To some extent the forces and policies which may foreshadow this NATO strategy are already visible. Both of the peripheral superpowers have begun to suffer a decline of political authority within their own alliance systems as a result of the re-emergence of Nationalism. Western European doubts of American commitments are now matched by doubts at home. NATO and the U.S. must face squarely these new realities and act in concert with those forces for change already working towards a multipolar world. And the decline in authority of the Soviet Union over the political fabric of the Warsaw Pact countries may allow the U.S. and Western Europe to take a step together towards theater nuclear war while allowing the U.S. and USSR to step back from strategic nuclear war.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Milvan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin, translated by Michael B. Petrovich, (New York, Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p.114.
2. George F. Kennan, "Europe in East-West Relations", Survey, (January, 1966), p.126.
3. Thomas W. Wolfe, Soviet Power in Europe, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 1.
4. Eric F. Goldman, The Crucial Decade and After - 1945-1960, (New York, Random House, 1960), pp.72-80.
5. Warner R. Schilling, American Arms and a Changing Europe, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973), pp.10-15.
6. Frederick S. Wyle, "The United States and West European Security", (Survival, January, 1972), pp.8-15.
7. This assumes, of course, that Soviet-American detente is not matched by a European-USSR detente.
8. Schilling, p.3.
9. Robin A. Remington, The Warsaw Pact: Case Studies in Communist Conflict Resolution, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971), pp.17-27.
10. Wolfe, p.3.
11. Wynfred Joshua, "A Strategic Concept for the Defence of Europe" (Orbis, Summer, 1973), p.449.
12. William P. Bundy, "International Security Today," (Foreign Affairs, October, 1974), pp.28-30.
13. Paul Lendvai, Eagles in Cobwebs: Nationalism and Communism in The Balkans, (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1969), pp370-381.
14. Frederick S. Wyle, "Is European Security Negotiable?", (Survival, June, 1970), p.191.



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